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## CRITICISMS AND DISCUSSIONS.

### "SELF-REALIZATION" AND THE WAY OUT.

As a theory the ethical doctrine of the English transcendentalists is reconstructive rather than constructive. Since Green's "Prolegomena" we have had from them nothing in the way of new and positive principles: at the most they have given us the formula of "self-realization," which they have derived altogether by criticism of the historical types of ethical theory. Though they differ from their predecessors in a more scientific psychology, better method, nicer illustration and finer literary style, they are still at the meeting of the ways, because they mistake a secondary for the fundamental fallacy in hedonism and rationalism, and thereby perceive not an original constructive point of departure for their own doctrine.

That fallacy is not, as the English transcendentalists take it to be, the sacrifice of the integrity of the self, on the one hand to sensibility, on the other to reason, but the greater sacrifice of infinite potentialities to an artificial general concept. In this essay I aim to point out the fundamental fallacy in rationalistic ethics, and to indicate a constructive way out for the self-realizationists.

We shall make a poor start if we attend at all to the traditional distinction between sensibility and reason and their ethical values. It is now a commonplace of moral philosophy that rationalism is quite unpsychologically founded. We shall begin well, if for a start we single out a central aspect of the Stoic ethics, against which modern psychology can direct a valid, but ignored, criticism. I mean the rationalistic attitude to "Fortune."

#### I.

In his *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (Bk. II, cap. 4) Boethius reports Wisdom as saying, "Adeo nihil est miserum, *nisi cum putes*; contraque beata sors omnis est aequanimitate tolerantis,"—which is almost a literal anticipation of Hamlet's reflection, "There's nothing

either good or bad but thinking makes it so." Modern psychology would develop these maxims in two directions. First: human consciousness, which only for analytic and expository purposes may be divided into special parts and separate processes, is the source of all value in the world, of good and evil in every sense. If we were merely automata—and in this day when we have talking machines and walking machines that do human things and feign human ends, the conception is not irrelevant,—conceivably we might come to make all those useful reactions on our environment which we now consciously make, but without thinking, they could be designated useful only by metaphor: to us as, *ex hypothesi*, automata, our environment and all its vicissitudes would be indifferent, neither good nor bad.

Now, by certain inveterate habits of thought, or under certain exigencies of explanation, we abstract from consciousness all its vital and sensitive content until it becomes merely cognitive. Then, forgetting that we have arrived by abstraction at this conception of the human mind as an *intellectus purus*, we submit that from reason alone the world and conscious existence derive all their value. But if consciousness were merely cognitive, we should at best be nothing more than intellectual automata; and thus our environment would be merely a system of mathematically related objects, devoid of all that would make life worth living. Only human consciousness, as phenomenally given in its integrity—cognitive, appetitive, and volitional through and through—can constitute excellence, establish ideals, and create an environment of good and evil.

Fortune, then, has no other origin than this:—it is the offspring, not, as the Stoics conceived it, of foreign and capricious fate, but of our own nature and idiosyncrasy. In other words, fortune is a short-hand term for all those things in the world which satisfy or dissatisfy our vital impulses, which are dear or repugnant to the heart, or delightful to the imagination.

Again: So far this is a very simple and obvious piece of psychology; but because the English transcendentalists, as before them the Stoics, consider only its subjective meaning, they miss its application and value in ethical theory. On the subjective side, while the Stoics saw that by negating the world, that by consciously willing to live without its goods, they could thus fortify themselves against "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," they did not see the deeper meaning of this attitude of spiritual detachment from the

world. Carry out this method of exclusion to its logical end, and it must result that there will be *neither a world nor a self at all*.

Modern psychology, on the other hand, taking for its datum the concrete phenomenal consciousness, not only names and describes our psychic processes in terms of the objects on which they function, but views these processes as constituting both the active substance and the content of the self. This is a method of *inclusion*, empirically based. But the inevitable abstraction which results from the subjective method of exclusion, led the rationalists, from the Stoics to Kant, to set up an artificial general concept as the real, essential self. As, in the view of the Stoics, the self could "cut loose" from fortune by denying the real existence of external goods, so, too, the soul could escape fortune by affirming only the validity and worth of intellectual processes as such. Psychologically viewed, this is not losing the self to find it, but finding the self to lose it in an empty form—and nothingness.

Under our analysis, it appears, fortune is but the complex of our possible interests objectified in our material, social and spiritual environment; and the concrete self is the complex of perceptive processes and vital reactions that create our demands, interests and ideals, and constitute the world of good and evil. Not, then, any abstract, formal divorce between sensibility and reason, but the insistence on a real, practical and absolute separation between the substance of consciousness and its content, between self and fortune (not-self),—this is the fundamental fallacy in all rationalistic ethics, from the Stoics to the English transcendentalists.

Let me add, before we proceed, that there is in this no tendency on my part to hark back to subjective idealism or solipsism. For, as we shall see, while the distinction of self from not-self is a function of the process of perception, in practice it becomes a futility and in ethical theory a superstition. The truth the distinction signalizes in ethics needs restatement. But as it stands historically in the system of the monists it is literally, in the Hellenistic sense, a *σκάνδαλον*,—a stumbling block. When we see how and in what sense this is so, we have found a constructive point of departure for the monistic theory of self-realization. To this we now turn.

## II.

The charge of formalism, which the self-realizationists bring against Kant's doctrine may be as justly laid against their own; and, further, their concept of personality, for from being a principle

which overcomes the simple psychological dualism of the rationalists, only results in a profounder dualism. This outcome is altogether the product of certain stubborn incoherences of thought, abetted by an inherited apriorism.

When the self-realizationists work from the dignity and authority of reason—which means that, *a priori*, sensibility is held in contempt—they arrive at the “idea of self” as the constitutive principle of morality. I do not deny the validity and worth of this principle; but I affirm that the constructive principle of morality is no such abstract idea and has no such ground and origin in human nature as the English transcendentalists allege. The authority of reason does not come from itself, but from our irrational nature,—from our despised sensibility and the moral consciousness, of which reason and reflection are a part but the last part. Only a mind sophisticated by idealistic tradition and inveterate abstract reflection can credit reason with more inherent dignity and authority than it grants to sensibility.

If we reduce the matter merely to verbal propriety, it is the truth that far from feeling being, as it is traditionally conceived, the servant of reason, reason is the servant of feeling. But in reality it is so because vital impulse creates first the demand for life and next for rationality in organizing our faculties and energies. In short, the dignity and authority of reason and the rationalistic “idea of self” are but contents of that very consciousness which they are supposed to explain,—ideals which it creates and explains.

If the case stands thus with the transcendental “idea of self,” if it is an empty *a priori* form, the self-realizationists must face a still graver charge: their apriorism creates a profounder dualism than anything Stoic or Kantian. We shall better see the truth of this if we observe how a member of the pluralist camp puts the case for the self-realizationists. Says Professor James Seth: “As the watchword of hedonism may be said to be self-satisfaction or self-gratification, and as that of rigorism [rationalism] is apt to be self-sacrifice and self-denial, so the watchword of eudæmonism may be said to be self-realization or self-fulfilment. It seems almost a truism to say that the end of human life is self-realization. The aim of every living being. . . may be described as self-preservation and self-development, or in a single term, self-realization. . . Moreover, every ethical theory might claim the term “self-realization,” as each might claim the term “happiness.” The question is, What is the “self”? or, *Which* self is to be realized? Hedonism answers, the

sentient self; rigorism, the rational self; eudæmonism, the total self, rational and sentient.”\*

Now, I submit, if to the ethical command “Realize thyself,” the question keeps the form, “*Which* self?” then we shall only concern ourselves again with the old problem of the *relation* of sensibility and reason in the *individual*, and we shall never thus accomplish anything more than a tentative reconstruction of the broken fragments of the historical types of ethical theory. Positive construction will begin only with a direct empirical answer to the question, ‘*Who* (or *What*) is my self?’ There is in this question no reference to sensibility or reason, or any merely conceived elements or processes of consciousness. For the question starts an immediate psychological investigation of the phenomenal consciousness as such, but soon rises out of its empirical confines into the metaphysical zone, without any violation of scientific method or human nature.

We proceed immediately from an irreducible datum of psychology. The teaching of to-day is apt to describe consciousness in terms of a few familiar characteristics: it is personal, always changing but sensibly continuous, selective, motor, etc. Paramount for ethics is the fact that all these are realized and expressed in another characteristic, namely, that consciousness is essentially *social*. However much theoretical psychology may insist on distinguishing in the process of perception the substance from the content of consciousness, the active knowing self from not-self, or “I” from “mine,” we must recognize in practice that these are abstract and relative distinctions.

In its objective references, as well as in its inner essence, consciousness is an *inclusive* activity. Prof. William James rather understates, or too pragmatically puts, this truth. The “sense of the shrinkage [and enlargement] of personality” is, he says, “a psychological phenomenon by itself.” It is not, however, so true that the concrete empirical self shrivels or expands, as that it actually *is* or is not, in direct proportion to the number and variety of the objects which appeal to sense and imagination and satisfy vital impulse. The phenomenon is an immediate and characteristic psychological datum. As, in perception, a taste which is not tasted, or pleasure which is not felt, is nothing, so in practice the self is zero if its activities center nowhere, and infinite if they have universal content and direction. The indisputable proof of this is no mere

\* James Seth, *A Study of Ethical Principles*, 1st edition (1894), p. 204. The italics in the quotation are Professor Seth’s.

pragmatic test, but the sense and emotion of personality in the presence of the world; we actually *feel* ourselves, not only real beings, but also greater or less individualities, according as our world and interests are widened or narrowed, recognized or ignored.

On the other hand, this psychological phenomenon is the first condemnation of the transcendental attitude to sensibility and reason and the disproof of the abstract "idea of self" as the constitutive principle of morality. Only a devotee of apriorism can dignify and sublimate the so-called spiritual processes of the self into a separate and authoritative unity on its own account, and name it *par excellence*—the self. Our bodies, family, possessions, and even our philosophies, no less than our spiritual processes as such, when they are intimately related to our finite organization and felt to be ours, are essentially part of the self.

We are ready now for the application, and for the formulating of our constructive principle. The immanent social function of consciousness—the innate tendency of self to inclusion of all reality—is the fundamental datum which the self-realizationists have ignored. In our view, the real and complete identification of self with universal reality is as much a psychological necessity as a moral ideal. In virtue of this social function of consciousness it is no longer possible either (1) to make self-consciousness idiocentric or (2) to split the universe into self and not-self. Without here at all passing into phenomenalism or solipsism, the ultimate and real distinction is between *the active, appropriating self* and *the potential self*. And, as in perception the apperceptive content of consciousness is the mind which makes experience from nature (not-self), so in practice the concrete social self constitutes morality from the potential self by appropriation and identification.

This distinction, from our point of view, is as relative and conventional as the distinction between selfishness and unselfishness: the difference is solely one of the universality and objectification of human activities and interests. "O Universe, I wish all that thou wishest," said Marcus Aurelius; and thus by identifying his will and interests with total reality, his own finite self became one with the universal self. This, then, is the constructive way out for the self-realizationists.

That the accidents of our physical nature, and of social and cosmic evolution, prevent the actual absorption of universal reality into the life of the human spirit, has nothing to do with the logical issue. The question, "*Who* (or *What*) is my self?" is already an-

swered. For objective reality—fortune, material goods, institutions, offices and humanity and God—stands over against the finite self, not as some absolute “other,” but as its own potential self. The Absolute, that is to say, is my real and complete self.

I may point the matter familiarly in this way. When we read in the Scriptures that “God so loved the world,” habitually we not only misplace the emphasis but also suppose that this act of the deity was wholly gratuitous and gracious on his part. But from the very nature of consciousness as social, anything less than the complete inclusion of the world (i. e., the totality of human spirits) in God’s love was impossible. And so must it be in our own case. Anything less than the identification of our finite, actual self with the Absolute, who is our infinite potential self, is logically impossible and morally futile.

To sum up: When the self-realizationists charge the rationalists with reducing morality to formalism, we may justly reply that their own concept of personality is a pure *a priori* product and their “idea of self” an empty abstraction. Their apriorism confines attention too much to the subjective content and meaning of personality, and their maxim, “Realize self” compels us again to ask the traditional question, “Which self?” And thus we never get beyond the problem of the relation of sensibility and reason in the life of the individual as such. On the other hand, the inquiry, “Who (or What) is my self?” has a direct empirical answer in the social nature of consciousness. On this datum of psychology as a stepping stone, we may rise without fear of hindrance or contradiction into the metaphysical zone. To be sure, psychology has nothing to say as to whether the universe is a personality or not. But for ourselves, assuming the proof of spiritual monism, “Realize self” becomes a concrete, practical maxim. For although we must wait on experience and social evolution for the knowledge of the means of self-realization, we are always sure of the nature of self and the content of the moral ideal. “Realize self” now means, “In your own finite life fulfil and perfect the life of the Absolute Spirit.”

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#### A TWENTIETH CENTURY ZENO.

In considering any attempt to prove Euclid’s parallel postulate, it is well to consider first what is meant by geometrical proof. In